

CLAIMS

1. A method of conducting a medical imaging business, comprising:
obtaining a plurality of medical images using a distributed medical imaging system (60);
viewing the obtained medical images using the distributed medical imaging system (60); and
charging for use of the distributed medical imaging system (60) based on the amount of usage of the medical imaging system (62).
2. The method of claim 1 wherein the act of charging for use of the distributed medical imaging system (60) based on the amount of usage of the medical imaging system (62) comprises charging for each medical image obtained by the medical imaging system (62).
3. The method of claim 1 wherein the act of charging for use of the distributed medical imaging system (60) based on the amount of usage of the medical imaging system (62) comprises charging for each medical image displayed by the medical imaging system (62).
4. The method of claim 1 wherein the act of charging for use of the distributed medical imaging system (60) based on the amount of usage of the medical imaging system (62) comprises charging for each patient from which images are obtained using the medical imaging system (62).
5. The method of claim 1, further comprising preparing financial documents reflecting the charges for use of the distributed medical imaging system (60).
6. The method of claim 1 wherein multiple components of the medical imaging system (62) are present in different locations, and wherein components of the medical imaging system (62) that are of the same type have different capabilities, and wherein

the method further comprises charging a site license for use of some of the components of the distributed medical imaging system (60) that have the different capabilities.

7. The method of claim 1 wherein the distributed medical imaging system (60) includes a processor executing software that may be upgraded, and wherein the method further comprises:

- upgrading the software; and
- charging a fee for upgrading the software.

8. The method of claim 1 wherein the act of charging for use of the medical imaging system (62) based on the amount of usage of the medical imaging system (62) comprises charging a first fee for each medical image obtained by the medical imaging system (62) and charging a second fee for each medical image displayed by the medical imaging system (62), the first fee being different from the second fee.

9. The method of claim 1 wherein the distributed medical imaging system (60) comprises an ultrasound imaging system (62), wherein the act of obtaining a plurality of medical images comprises obtaining a plurality of ultrasound images using the ultrasound imaging system (62), wherein the act of viewing the obtained medical images comprises viewing the obtained ultrasound images using the ultrasound imaging system (62), and wherein the act of charging for use of the distributed medical imaging system (60) comprises charging for use of the ultrasound imaging system (62) based on the amount of usage of the ultrasound imaging system (62).

10. In a distributed medical imaging system (60) having a plurality of medical imaging components coupled to a data processor, at least some of the components being software based, a method of upgrading the software-based components of the imaging system comprising:

- loading upgraded software into the data processor; and
- uploading the upgraded software from the data processor to the software-based components that are to be upgraded.

11. The method of claim 10, further comprising charging a license fee for the upgrading of the software-based components of the imaging system (62).

12. The method of claim 11 wherein at least some of the software-based components of the imaging system (62) are present in different locations, wherein only some of the software-based components of the imaging system (62) may be upgraded, and wherein the method further comprises charging a site license for the upgrading of each of the software-based components of the imaging system (62) that are upgraded.

13. The method of claim 10 wherein the distributed medical imaging system (60) comprises a distributed ultrasound imaging (60) system having a plurality of ultrasound imaging components coupled to the data processor.

14. A method of charging for the purchase of a distributed medical imaging system (60), comprising charging at least a portion of a purchase price for use of the distributed medical imaging system (60) based on the amount of usage of the medical imaging system (62).

15. The method of claim 14 wherein the act of charging for the purchase of the distributed medical imaging system (60) based on the amount of usage of the medical imaging system (62) comprises charging for each medical image obtained by the medical imaging system (62).

16. The method of claim 14 wherein the act of charging for the purchase of the distributed medical imaging system (60) based on the amount of usage of the medical imaging system (62) comprises charging for each medical application which can be performed by the medical imaging system (62).

17. The method of claim 14 wherein the act of charging for the purchase of the distributed medical imaging system (60) based on the amount of usage of the medical

imaging system (62) comprises charging for each patient from which images are obtained using the medical imaging system (62).

18. The method of claim 14 wherein the medical imaging system (62) includes a processor executing software that may be upgraded, and wherein the method further comprises:

- upgrading the software; and
- charging a fee for upgrading the software.

19. The method of claim 14 wherein the act of charging for the purchase of the distributed medical imaging system (60) based on the amount of usage of the medical imaging system (62) comprises charging a first fee for each medical image obtained by the medical imaging system (62) and charging a second fee for each medical image displayed by the medical imaging system (62), the first fee being different from the second fee.

20. The method of claim 14 wherein the medical imaging system (62) comprises an ultrasound imaging system (10), and wherein the act of charging at least a portion of the purchase price for use of the distributed medical imaging system (60) comprises charging based on the amount of usage of the ultrasound imaging system (10).

21. The method of claim 14, wherein the act of charging for the purchase of the distributed medical imaging system (60) based on the amount of usage of the medical imaging system (62) comprises charging a monthly or annual fee for the system.

22. A method of providing a diagnostic imaging system in a health care facility, the method comprising:

- installing a data network (80) in the health care facility having a plurality of data ports distributed throughout a significant portion of the health care facility;

- obtaining a plurality of diagnostic signal acquisition units structured to provide diagnostic signals corresponding to diagnostic images acquired using the diagnostic signal acquisition units (90);

coupling the diagnostic signal acquisition units to the data network (80) as needed to obtain diagnostic signals using the diagnostic signal acquisition units (90);

coupling a network data processor to the data network (80), the network data processor being structured to process the diagnostic signals provided by the diagnostic signal acquisition units (90) to produce image data; and

obtaining a plurality of display units (98) structured to display diagnostic images corresponding to the image data processed by the network data processor, the number of display units obtained corresponding to at least a number of acquisition units (90) that are used simultaneously.

23. The method of claim 22, further comprising:

obtaining a plurality of control units (94) structured to control the operation of either the diagnostic signal acquisition units (90) or the display units (98), the number of control units (94) obtained corresponding to at least a the number of control units (94) that are simultaneously needed; and

coupling the control units (94) to the data network (80) as needed to either obtain or review diagnostic images.

24. The method of claim 22 wherein the diagnostic signal acquisition units (90) comprise ultrasound acquisition units (90a).

25. The method of claim 22, further comprising expanding the capacity of the diagnostic imaging system by:

obtaining an additional number of the diagnostic signal acquisition units (90), the number of additional acquisition units (90) obtained corresponding to an estimate of the additional number of image acquisition units (90) that will be needed to acquire diagnostic images.

26. The method of claim 22, further comprising expanding the capabilities of the diagnostic imaging system (10), comprising obtaining at least one diagnostic signal acquisition unit (90) or at least one display unit (98) having expanded capabilities.

27. The method of claim 22, further comprising expanding the capabilities of the diagnostic imaging system (10), comprising loading upgraded software into the network data processor.

28. The method of claim 22, further comprising uploading the upgraded software from the network data processor to at least one of the diagnostic signal acquisition units (90) or at least one of the display units (98).

29. The method of claim 22, further comprising expanding the capacity of the diagnostic imaging system (10) by adding new data processing capability to the network (80).